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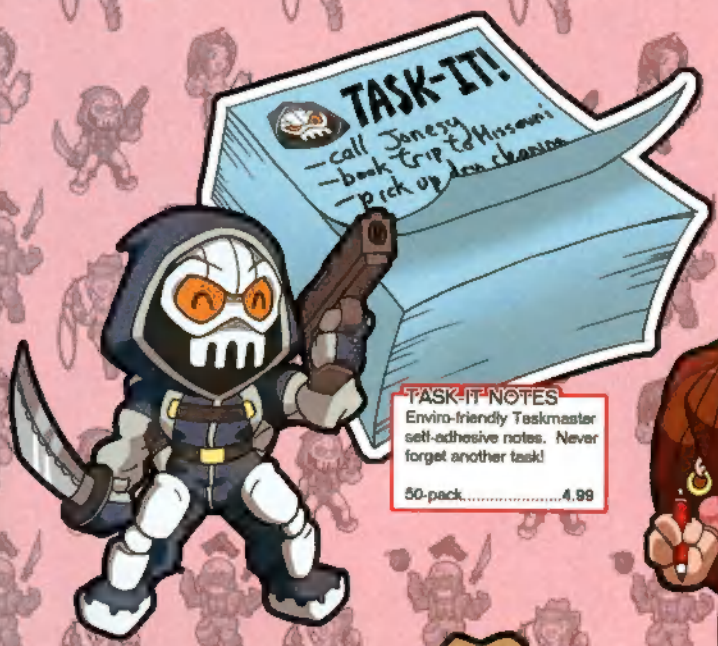

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TO MOST, THE LETTER X STANDS FOR AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY. THE UNDERWORLD IS NO EXCEPTION. FOR PEOPLE WITH EVIL INTENT, IT STANDS FOR ALEX HAYDEN, THE HIRED GUN WITH NO PAST AND A BURNING DESIRE TO TAKE HIS POSITION AS THE WORLD'S DEADLIEST AND HIGHEST PAID MERCENARY.

STAN LEE PRESENTS...

AGENT X

WRITER GAIL SIMONE ART AND COLOR UDON WITH ALVIN LEE, ROB ROSS, ERIC VEDDER, THEREALT!, SHANE LAW, & CALVIN LO UDON CHIEF ERIC KO
LETTERS CORY PETIT ASSISTANT EDITOR LYNNE YOSHII
EDITOR ANDREW LIS EDITOR IN CHIEF JOE QUESADA PRESIDENT BILL JEMAS

DEAD MAN'S SWITCH PART FIVE OF SIX:

A LITTLE CRAZY

ALEX

HIGASHI

SANDI

SAGURI

TASKMASTER

MARY ZERO

OUTLAW

ARCADE

PREVIOUSLY

EXCERPTED FROM THE THOUGHTS OF A NEAR-DEATH ALEX HAYDEN...

THE TIME-SAVING THING ABOUT ONLY HAVING A MONTH'S WORTH OF MEMORIES IS THAT, WHEN YOUR LIFE FLASHES BEFORE YOUR EYES, IT'S BARELY ENOUGH MATERIAL TO FILL THE SPACE BETWEEN TWO RAPID EYE-BLINKS...AND THEN, HERE I AM, LYING IN THE DIRT, UNABLE TO HEAL BECAUSE OF THE BULLET STUCK IN MY THROAT.

EARLY CURTAIN, NO ENCORE ALLOWED.

SO I'M REFLECTING ON THIS SMALL SPAN OF TIME, AND WOULDN'T YOU KNOW IT, IT'S ONLY AS I'M ABOUT TO BE WHISKED OFFSTAGE INVOLUNTARILY THAT I START TO WONDER HOW I GOT HERE.

I KNOW I SHOWED UP AT SANDI'S DOORSTEP, AND, BEING A PERSON WITH MORE HEART THAN GOOD SENSE, SHE TOOK ME IN: A DIRTY STRANGER WITH NO IDEA ABOUT HIS OWN IDENTITY. TOGETHER WE TRIED TO MAKE SOMETHING GREAT OUT OF NOTHING. WE TRIED TO BUILD A GUN-FOR-HIRE BUSINESS; TO EACH AS HIS ABILITIES ALLOW AND ALL.

SANDI'S FORMER BOYFRIEND THE TASKMASTER, AND THE MISPLACED TEXAN OUTLAW SET ABOUT TO TRAINING ME, AND, AS PAYMENT FOR A PARTICULARLY SMELLY AND AWFUL MONKEY-CHASING GIG, SANDI AND I RECEIVED THE BATTERED THEME PARK WHERE I'M GOING TO CHOKE OUT MY LAST BREATH.

I UPSET THE WRONG PEOPLE, I GUESS, WHICH, BEING WHO I AM, WAS PROBABLY INEVITABLE. THESE PEOPLE, THE FOUR WINDS, THEY WANT THIS LAND FOR SOME HOITY-TOITY HOUSING DEAL, AND I CHOSE NOT TO SELL. THEY MADE A COUNTEROFFER THAT INVOLVED LIVE AMMO.

THERE'S A KID HERE WITH ME, MARY IS HER NAME...ASIDE FROM ME, MOST PEOPLE NEVER EVEN REALIZE SHE'S THERE, DUE TO SOME FREAK MUTANT CURSE SHE LIVES UNDER.

SO THAT'S KIND OF IRONIC, EVEN IF I COULD SPIT OUT SOME LAST WORDS, MARY COULDN'T PASS THEM ON TO MY FRIENDS. HEH. BUT IF I COULD SAY SOME FINAL PIECE OF WISDOM FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS BEFORE I BITE IT FOR GOOD, I'D LIKE TO THINK IT'D PROBABLY BE...

"MONKEYS ARE BAD NEWS. AVOID MONKEYS ENTIRELY, IF POSSIBLE."

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"I'm so sorry, Alex!
"I tried to use the phone, but the lady on the other end couldn't hear my voice.
urhk...urhk...
"Then I tried to borrow a ride, you know, so I could drive you to the hospital...?
urhk...urhk...
"...but I don't really know how to drive good yet!
urrr
ALPINE PARK
"It's all my fault. I can't get you the help you need. No one notices me.
"No one but you.
...
"And now I'm scared. Really scared...
...urr...
"I'm totally afraid, Alex."

I'm afraid you're going to die before you can ever know that you're my boyfriend forever.
urhk...

Alex, I can't...
I can't carry you. You're going to have to help.
Start breathing again, damn it!
urhk... urhk...
Alex! Someone's coming!
urhk...
KLOOOMPPH
Oops!
Sorry! I'm sorry!
urrrrhk.
I believe we have an appointment...?
That is, unless someone else here fits your unlikely description.
He needs help, mister. He can't breathe.
I'm Arcade, Mr. Hayden.
Your female said you were in need of an...extreme ride specialist?

Oh, good lord! No!
What sort of complete bastard sets fire to an innocent carousel?
That's a turn-of-the-century Gervoise! The horses are hand-carved basswood!
There are less than a dozen left in this hemisphere, you vile and hideous thing!
...urhk...
Leave him alone!
Hey, boss-- there's a dead guy over here smells like kerosene. He musta torched the merry-go-round, I bet.
Eh?
Well! Then I guess somebody here deserves a big lolly.
...*...
Looks like we have ventilatory trauma, boys. Oxygen starvation.
Nasty way to snuff it.

Kenichi Building
...being absurd, Saguri. I will see whomever I choose to see.
Our Lady hasn't even been dead a year. Pursuing this ...this secretary... is a betrayal of her memory!
Our Lady would forgive me.
I'm sorry, Saguri. I know you loved her, too.
More than you could know, you faithless eunuch.
Forgive us, Higashi-sama. He insisted upon seeing you.
'Insisted?' Who 'insisted?'
I insisted. Came here to offer you freaks a deal.
You're pissed at Wade Wilson for killing your boss lady, right? And you're miffed at Alex Hayden for not selling you his land.
Well, guess what, friends and neighbors?
I can give you both.

Alpine Park
What do you think, boys? Little incision, 'bout a half inch up from the cricoid cartilage?
That's what I thought, too.
SQUISH
Either of you two happen to have a pen? I suppose I should have asked that first, eh?
Take the ink tube out, would you, Miguel?
Alex?
Alex?
He saved you.
Well! You are a hardy fellow.
The good news is that you're alive. The bad news is that your carousel is ruined.
Amazing the things you pick up being a murderous psychotic, I find.
I believe you still have a bullet in there somewhere -- appears your flesh has healed around it. A disgusting but valuable talent.

I'd ask if you have any brain damage, but if you can answer the question, then there's no need to ask it, right? Love your notepad, by the way.
'Sandi' said you needed an estimate on fixing the place up. Let's take a rundown.
Miguel, do you have another pen?
Er, sorry, boss.
PLISH!
Ew.
Guess we jumped the gun on that brain damage question, eh, sport?
KLOOOMPPH

"Come on, Mr. Hayden... Let's *try* to retain a little self-control, shall we?"
The same man?
Hayden *is Wade?* How did...how could we have been so *blind?*
We've been *fools!* He *murdered* her!
Well, she's taking this well.
Don't attract her attention if you value your life.
You get the deal, right? You kill Hayden a thousand times, I don't care...but keep Sandi out of this.
You have no idea what you've set in motion. Saguri will order all of your deaths for aiding the murderer of our Lady, and she'll have the full backing of our board. That is her right as Enforcer.
I know what you're used to, 'Taskmaster.'
We're not costumed villains. We're a corporation. And corporations have voracious appetites and long memories.
We had a *deal!*
Saguri won't honor it. And even if you *could* kill everyone in this building...
...our global work force is twenty thousand strong. You'll *never* be free of us. Never.
Get Miss Brandenberg away from here. Dye her hair. Change her name. Tell no one where you're going.
Save her life. I cannot.
Stinkin' coward!

I can help you. You'll need more than mechanics. You'll need training, supplies, replacement parts. It'll cost you.
WILL GET THE $$$
Sure you wouldn't rather just sell out to me? I'm really rather partial to this sort of place. Call [redacted] a hobbyist.
For instance, this [redacted] a real beauty of a wooden coaster. File down the brakes, change the angle of descent, and you'd have [redacted] real killer.
DON'T WANT TO KILL CUSTOMERS.
Really?
To each his own, I suppose.
THANK YOU SAVE LIFE. CALL SANDY FOR FOLLOW-UP MEETING, PLEASE.
Hey, what's the fun in watching [redacted] die unless they're in a giant pinball machine at the time? That's what I always say.

I'll send some men. Good luck.
You!
You should have seen the truth! Your weakness kept us from it!
They die. They all die. Every gun [redacted]n hire is already being retained. You will bear this cost personally for your lack of judgment.
And [redacted] I order you to spare the girl's life?
Because I care for you, because our Lady cared for you...
...I will act [redacted] your advisor one final time.
Do not give that order, Higashi-sama.

Higashi-sama has directed us to provide you with a courtesy escort, sir.
Just a friendly car ride, right?
You guys are adorable.
<Saguri-san says to save this one's head for display...>
Hey, you know what I watched on television last night?
WHAM!
...a Chow Yun Fat marathon.
FWIPP
BLAM
BLAM
<Betcha didn't know I speak Japanese, huh?>
<You have anything you want to tell me, Ace?>

Hayden, Hayden. Listen, if you can hear me... I messed up. Sandi's in trouble and you're closer.
...urkk....
Even if she your girlfriend, Alex--
Hurry. You hear me? Hurry.
SANDI--- TROUBLE!
--I hope they don't hurt her.
BRRRRINNG BRRRRINNG
Hello?
Sandi. Get out of the apartment now. Don't take anything, just run.
mrooowr.
Tony? What's going on?
Run, Sandi!

KRASH!
Oh, no.
Mroooowr!
Sandi? What's happening?

Sandi! Answer me!
KRAK!
She hurt Bruce bad.
I think I just stepped on his teeth.
Hey, pretty lady...
Stop her!
Why'ntcha come on out now, with no more fuse.
Go check around the back and make sure she doesn't hightail it out the window.
Be a good girl, and you won't get hurt.
This offer's good for about another minute, by the way...
Strong. I'm going to go out strong.

Let me have the knife. I want to do her. She cracked Bruce's skull.
You know, I told you it's a bad idea to date within your assault team.
I'm losing my patience here, lady.
What's that?
Some kind of note under the door...
It's a riddle or something...
"What's white and goes 'Snap, Crackle, Pop'?"
There's another note...
I don't get it.
YOUR COLLARBONE!

KRASHH!
Come out here! Now!
Wait... wait!
BAP!
BAP!
....Hey!
DONGG!
Hey, what's with all the noi...
CRASH!
Oh!

SORRY. LEFT GUNS AT PARK. WILL BUY NEW TOILET. YOU OK?
We're not just okay... We are alive and spectacular!
They were going to kill me. As a message to you.
ALPINE PARK AT DAWN
These people love drama, huh? They don't know what century we're in.
Alex? What are you doing?
Oh, no.
Oh, Alex... don't!
PFUNT!

I ACCEPT.
I swear, that [redacted] a completely gross place to leave a note, Alex.
NOT SAFE HERE. CALL OUTLAW AND DARKMASTER TO MEET AT PARK.
Soon, inside Alpine Park...
Quit squirming. I ain't too good at this when you're still.
Seems silly to worry about getting your blood on me. It'd prob'ly make [redacted] ten [redacted] younger.
OW
Found a note on the gate for ya, by the way. Who's Mary?
I'm going to see if I can help you, Alex. If I don't come back, do not forget me!
Love always,
Mary Zero

Hmm. I always dreamed I'd meet a guy who can't talk and don't need Bactine.
Tony, you told them Alex was Wade? That's what all this is about?
Okay, I screwed up. I'm getting tired of saying that lately, but I'm sorry.
TAP
TAP
TAP
YOU SUCCCCK!
All right. I suck.
NO, FOR REAL, YOU REALLY SUCK!
It doesn't matter now. Outlaw can light out, but we know they want the three of us so we're stuck together. And these guys are paying for top talent to mow us all down.
YOU SUCK MASTER, KING OF ALL SUCK!
No. We're in this together.
I'll say it, we could run. That idea sound good to anyone?

It's not just about us now. Nobody's saying any of us are cowards. But there's Sandi to consider.
If we leave, they'll never stop looking for us. This is a huge organization.
Please don't make this decision because of me.
Every angle I look at this from just makes me feel like we're more trapped. You got any thoughts, Alex?
WE STAY. WE FIGHT BACK. WE END THIS.
HERE IS WHAT WE DO.
CANDY CORN
SANDI— MAKE TWO PHONE CALLS.

Dawn.
L PINE
WE USE THE BUS AS COVER. IF WE NEED TO FALL BACK, WE SPLIT UP.
ahucck. acth.
Here they come.
That's *it*? Those three guys? I got all death-wished up!
What do I need *you two* for? I could take *these* guys *myse*...
Hush.

Uh-oh.
The news ain't gettin' any gooder.
DO NOT OPEN
You know we're never gonna survive.
Unh...
..un..less...
CH-CHAK
CH-CHAK
...we get a little--
--CRAZY.
-THE FINAL SHOWDOWN.